

TOWN OF STOW
GLEASONDALE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the October 7, 2021 Gleasondale Local Historic District Study Committee Meeting

Members present: Jen Gero, Margaret Costello, Dorothy Spaulding, Eve Fischer

Members absent: Catherine Hammill

The meeting was called to order at 2:00PM

Town Planner Jesse Steadman said the last group with a focus on historic preservation in the Gleasondale Village neighborhood had been a subcommittee of the Planning Board, charged with studying preservation options for the Village, including National Register of Historic Places District listing, Local Historic Districts under Mass. General Law Ch. 40C, and demolition delay bylaws. Jesse Steadman said that the previous committee decided that a Local Historic District would offer the greatest protection for the village and a high degree of flexibility for the Town. Jesse Steadman recalled that the Select Board voted to create this Local Historic District Study Committee originally in 2019.

Jesse Steadman reminded the committee that state statute requires a call for nominees be sent to both the area association of realtors and architects. Jesse Steadman said that the Select Board received no response from the Greater Boston Society of Architects, but that Jen Gero and Catherine Hammill had both been nominated by the Greater Boston Association of Realtors.

Margaret Costello said that she is concerned that the committee will need to redo much of the outreach and deliberation work that was completed by the previous subcommittee, including the survey of households in the village. Jesse Steadman said that much of that previous work, including household surveys and the historic inventories that are now part of the Massachusetts Historical Commission's database, will not need to be repeated.

Eve Fischer said that her experience with other town committees have been frustrating as it is not always clear what her tasks and goals are for each meeting. Eve Fischer asked which things the committee can choose to regulate in an eventual Local Historic District bylaw. Assistant Planner Malcolm Ragan said a bylaw may regulate exterior architectural features visible from a public way. Eve Fischer recalled that the design charette and public outreach process for the area conducted by a group of UMass students had encouraged the creation of a Local Historic District to preserve the intact mill village character.

Margaret Costello recalled that some residents when surveyed were concerned about additional costs they could incur being in such a district and said that the district should not regulate many minor exterior features.

Jen Gero asked what work has been completed to date. Margaret Costello said that all households in Gleasondale have been surveyed on multiple occasions regarding the appropriate boundaries of the district and which exterior architectural features should be regulated. Margaret Costello said that one or two respondents expressed some concern about living in a Historic District and were sensitive about the ideas of town control over their homes.

Jesse Steadman said that in subcommittee meetings after the most recent survey work, there was agreement that residents of the village would be less inclined to get involved if there were nitpicky regulations over renovations and small exterior changes, and that there was greater appetite to develop design guidelines to ensure teardowns and new construction are appropriate to the district.

Dorothy Spaulding recalled her involvement in the Stow Historical Commission, and the historic surveys contracted through Public Archaeology Survey Team, Inc. (PAST) that inventoried historic structures and districts in town for inclusion by the Mass Historic Commission. Dorothy Spaulding said the surveyor was impressed by the state of preservation in Gleasondale Village. Dorothy Spaulding noted with regret that some structures have replaced windows, many of which were installed in the early 20th century.

Dorothy Spaulding commented that there has been some turnover in the upper area of Gleasondale, with 4 houses recently changing hands.

Committee Organization

Eve Fischer motion to elect Jen Gero as Chair of the committee

Dorothy Spaulding seconded

Roll Call Vote: Dorothy Spaulding **-Yea**; Eve Fischer **-Yea**; Jen Gero **-Yea**; Margaret Costello **-Yea**

Jen Gero motioned to elect Margaret Costello as Vice Chair

Eve Fischer seconded

Roll Call Vote: Dorothy Spaulding **-Yea**; Eve Fischer **-Yea**; Jen Gero **-Yea**; Margaret Costello **-Yea**

Workplan

Assistant Planner Malcolm Ragan told the committee that they are required to draft a preliminary report, to be reviewed by MHC, outlining the historical and architectural significance of the district. Malcolm Ragan said that the final draft must also include a draft of the proposed district bylaw. Malcolm Ragan asked if the committee believes they have enough information from past work for staff to begin drafting some sections of the preliminary report and the bylaw.

Eve Fischer asked if it would be a good idea to speak with new owners in the district. Dot Spaulding said that those owners should be approached and provided a copy of the historic inventory for their homes. Dot Spaulding said that the historic inventory created a suggested district boundary that can be modified if necessary. Eve Fischer asked about the current extent of the proposed district. Dot Spaulding recalled that the historic inventory district boundary had been tweaked to include the area around Railroad Avenue following some comments from the Historical Commission and old Gleasondale subcommittee. Margaret Costello said that the McDonald farm may also be appropriate to include in the eventual district.

Planner Jesse Steadman suggested the committee organize a presentation for the neighborhood to explain previous findings and give key takeaways, explain the concepts behind a Local Historic District, and request feedback on design guidelines, and other topics related to an eventual district bylaw.

Malcolm Ragan said he will provide the committee some documentation of the prior work done by both the Stow Historical Commission and the old Gleasondale Neighborhood subcommittee. Malcolm Ragan said the committee could then discuss which sections of the preliminary report can start being drafted and decide what further discussion is needed to begin creating a draft bylaw.

Eve Fischer and Margaret Costello volunteered to deliver surveys to the newer residents in Gleasondale. Malcolm Ragan said he can provide a blank copy of the survey and the historic inventories for those homes once he knows exactly which houses have changed hands.

Possible Grant Funding

Malcolm Ragan said MHC offers some grant funding for historic inventories, and that this funding could be applied for if the committee wishes to expand the boundaries of the district beyond what was demarcated in the area inventory done by PAST inc. Malcolm Ragan said the deadline for pre-applications for this grant is on November 15, and he will begin preparing an application for that grant funding if the committee decides it is necessary at the next meeting.